

AMENDMENT TO THE CLAIMS

1-12. (Cancelled)

13. (Currently amended) A method of operating a vending machine, comprising:
receiving, from a customer, a request to dispense an item at the vending machine;
determining, by the vending machine, that the item will not~~cannot~~ be dispensed
by the vending machine;~~and~~

determining, by the vending machine, a state of a service queue at a retail
establishment; and

outputting to the customer, in the case that the state of the service queue is
determined to indicate fewer than a predefined threshold number of customers waiting in
the service queue, a coupon for the item to be redeemed at [[a]] the retail establishment,
wherein the outputting is conducted based on the determination that the item will not
~~cannot~~ be dispensed.

14. (Currently amended) The method of claim 13, wherein the determining that the
item will not be dispensed by the vending machine comprises:

determining that the item cannot be dispensed by the vending machine due to the
item being out of stock at the vending machine~~outputted coupon is redeemable at a retail
establishment.~~

15. (Currently amended) The method of claim 13, wherein the determining that the
item will not be dispensed by the vending machine comprises:

determining that an amount of inventory of the item at the vending machine is
below a predefined inventory threshold~~outputting is further based on a predetermined
condition being identified at the retail establishment.~~

16. (Currently amended) The method of claim 13, wherein the coupon is for a
discount on the item if redeemed by the customer at the retail establishment~~determining
step includes determining whether the vending machine is out of stock of the item.~~

17. (Currently amended) A method of ~~operating a vending machine~~, comprising:
determining, by a device associated with a retail establishment, a state of a service queue at ~~[[a]]the~~ retail establishment;
~~in response to the determined state~~, transmitting, in the case that it is determined that the state of the service queue is indicative of fewer than a predefined threshold number of customers waiting in the service queue, a signal to ~~the a~~ vending machine from the retail establishment; ~~and~~
—— in response to, the signal being operative to cause the vending machine to ~~[[,]]~~ outputting, to a customer at the vending machine, a coupon that is redeemable at the retail establishment; and
accepting, at the retail establishment and from the customer, the coupon for redemption.
18. (Currently amended) The method of claim 17, wherein the signal is only operative to cause the vending machine to output the coupon in the case that one or more of: (i) the vending machine is low on change; (ii) the vending machine is out of change; and (iii) the vending machine has lower than a predetermined threshold of an item requested by the customer in stock ~~is outputted upon the customer requesting a transaction at the vending machine.~~
19. (Currently amended) The method of claim 17, wherein the vending machine comprises an ATM machine ~~signal is transmitted by a human operator.~~
20. (Currently amended) The method of claim 17, wherein the vending machine comprises a parking meter device ~~signal is generated and transmitted automatically.~~
21. (Currently amended) The method of claim 17, wherein the vending machine comprises a slot machine ~~signal is transmitted directly from the retail establishment to the vending machine.~~

22. (Currently amended) The method of claim 17, wherein the vending machine comprises a laundry machine ~~signal is transmitted from the retail establishment to the vending machine by way of a controller located remotely from the retail establishment.~~

23. (Currently amended) A system ~~for selectively causing a vending machine to output coupons, the system comprising:~~

a detection means device that are located at a retail establishment, the detection device being operable to ~~for detecting whether a current rate of transactions being experienced predetermined condition exists at the retail establishment; and~~

a processing device associated with the retail establishment, the processing device being operable to determine that the current rate of transactions is indicative of fewer than a predefined threshold rate of transactions; and

a transmitting device associated with the retail establishment, the transmitting device being operable to transmit, to a vending machine and in the case that the current rate of transactions is determined to be indicative of fewer than the predefined threshold rate of transactions, a trigger signal; and

[[a]]the vending machine including:

a receiving device operable to receive the trigger signal;

a controller operable to determine, based on a receipt of the trigger signal, that a coupon is to be output to a customer of the vending machine; and

an offer device operable to ~~means for~~ selectively outputting a the coupon in response to the controller; and
the retail establishment including:

a redemption device operable to accept the coupon for redemption at the retail establishment; ~~the offer means selective upon the detection of the predetermined condition; and~~

~~communication means for allowing data communication between said detection means and said offer means.~~

24. (Currently amended) The system of claim 23, wherein the controller is further operable to determine that the coupon is to be output based on one or more of: (i) an

indication that the vending machine is low on change; (ii) an indication that the vending machine is out of change; and (iii) an indication that the vending machine has lower than a predetermined threshold amount of inventory of an item requested by the customer in stock~~said communication means includes a controller connected for data communication with said detection means and said offer means.~~

25. (Currently amended) The system of claim 23, wherein said vending machine comprises an electronic toll booth~~is installed outside said retail establishment.~~

26. (Currently amended) The system of claim ~~[[25]]~~23, wherein said vending machine comprises an arcade game device~~is located remotely from said retail establishment.~~

27. (Currently amended) A system ~~for selectively causing a vending machine to output coupons, the system~~ comprising:

a processing device associated with a retail establishment, the processing device being operable to determine whether a current time satisfies a predetermined criteria based on hours of operation of the retail establishment; and

a trigger device associated with the means for generating a signal at a retail establishment, the trigger device being operable to transmit, to a vending machine and in the case that the current time satisfies the predetermined criteria based on hours of operation of the retail establishment, a trigger signal; and

[[a]]the vending machine including:

a receiving device operable to receive the trigger signal;

a controller operable to determine, based on a receipt of the trigger signal, that a coupon is to be output to a customer of the vending machine; and

an offer device operable to means for selectively outputting a the coupon in response to the controller; said offer means being responsive to said signal by outputting a coupon upon the vending machine receiving a transaction request and the retail establishment including:

a redemption device operable to accept the coupon for redemption at the retail establishment.

28-29. (Cancelled)

30. (Currently amended) A method, comprising:

determining, by a vending machine, an indication of a transaction request of a customer;

determining~~processing~~, by the vending machine, that an item transaction
associated with the customer's transaction request will not be dispensed;

determining, by the vending machine, that a rate of transactions currently being experienced by a retail establishment is less than a predetermined threshold rate of transactions~~qualifying condition~~;

~~determining, by the vending machine, that the qualification condition is satisfied at least in part based on a state associated with a retail establishment; and~~

outputting, by the vending machine, ~~and~~ based at least in part on (i) the determination that the rate of transactions currently being experienced by the retail establishment is less than the predetermined threshold rate of transactions~~qualification condition is satisfied~~, and (ii) the determination that the item will not be dispensed, an offer to the customer.

31. (Currently amended) The method of claim 30, wherein the offer comprises a discount for the item if purchased by the customer at the retail establishment
~~determination of the qualifying condition is conducted after the processing of the transaction.~~

32. (Currently amended) The method of claim 30, wherein the offer comprises a discount for the item if purchased by the customer at the retail establishment within a limited period of time following the customer's transaction request at the vending machine~~determination that the qualifying condition is satisfied is conducted after the processing of the transaction.~~

33. (Currently amended) The method of claim 30, wherein the outputting of the offer is further based on one or more of: (i) a determination that the vending machine is low on change; (ii) a determination that the vending machine is out of change; and (iii) a determination that the vending machine has lower than a predetermined threshold amount of inventory of the item in stock ~~conducted after the processing of the transaction.~~

34. (Currently amended) The method of claim 30, wherein the determining that the item will not be dispensed comprises:

determining that the item is out of stock at the vending machine ~~qualifying condition comprises a condition based on hours of operation associated with the retail establishment.~~

35. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~[[34]]~~30, wherein the determining that the item will not be dispensed comprises:

determining that the an inventory of the item at the vending machine is lower than a predetermined inventory threshold ~~qualifying condition comprises a condition that the retail establishment be open for business.~~

36-50. (Cancelled)

51. (Previously presented) The method of claim 30, wherein the outputting comprises transmitting an indication of the offer to a device associated with the customer.

52. (Previously presented) The method of claim 51, wherein the customer device comprises a mobile terminal.

53. (Previously presented) The method of claim 52, wherein the mobile terminal comprises one or more of a cellular telephone and a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA).

54. (Currently amended) A system, comprising:

a vending machine associated with a retail establishment, the vending machine operable to:

determine an indication of a transaction request of a customer, the transaction request indicating an item desired by the customer;

processes a transaction associated with the customer's transaction request, wherein processing comprises dispensing, via the vending machine, a unit of the item requested by the customer;

~~determine a qualifying condition;~~

~~determine that the qualification condition is satisfied at least in part based on a state associated with that a different item offered for sale via the retail establishment is overstocked at the retail establishment; and~~

~~output, based at least in part on a the determination that the different item is overstocked at the retail establishment qualification condition is satisfied, an offer to the customer, the offer comprising a discount on the different item;~~

~~—— a sensor operatively coupled to determine the state associated with the retail establishment; and~~

~~a point-of-sale terminal of the retail establishment, the point-of-sale terminal in communication with the sensor and the vending machine, and wherein the point-of-sale terminal is operable to:~~

~~—— receive, from the sensor, an indication of the detected state associated with the retail establishment; and~~

~~—— transmit, to the vending machine, the indication of the detected state associated with the retail establishment.~~

55. (Currently amended) The system of claim 54, further comprising:

a sensor operatively coupled to determine that the different item is overstocked at the retail establishment; and

a point-of-sale terminal of the retail establishment, the point-of-sale terminal in communication with the sensor and the vending machine, and wherein the point-of-sale terminal is operable to:

receive, from the sensor, an indication of the overstock state of the different product at the retail establishment;
transmit, to the vending machine, an indication of the detected overstock state of the different product at the retail establishment; and
accept for redemption, from the customer, a coupon output by the vending machine, the coupon being indicative of the offer for the discount on the different item
~~wherein the transmitting is operable to be conducted upon the elapse of a pre-determined time interval.~~

56. (Currently amended) The system of claim 54, wherein the vending machine comprises an ATM device~~transmitting is operable to be conducted upon a determination of a change in the state associated with the retail establishment.~~

57. (Currently amended) The system of claim 54, wherein the vending machine comprises a parking meter device~~state associated with the retail establishment comprises a number of people waiting for service at the retail establishment.~~

58. (Currently amended) The system of claim ~~[[57]]~~54, wherein the vending machine comprises a slot machine~~sensor comprises one or more of a motion detector and an infrared sensor.~~

59. (Currently amended) The system of claim ~~[[57]]~~54, wherein the vending machine comprises a laundry machine~~further comprising:~~
~~a camera operable to capture images associated with the number of people waiting for service at the retail establishment, the camera being in communication with the sensor.~~

60. (Currently amended) The system of claim ~~[[59]]~~54, wherein the vending machine is operable to output the offer for the discount on the different item by transmitting an indication of the offer to a mobile device associated with the customer, further comprising:

a point-of-sale terminal of the retail establishment, the point-of-sale terminal being operable to:

receive an indication of the offer for the discount on the different item from the mobile device associated with the customer; and
process a sale of a unit of the different item to the customer for a discounted price based at least in part on a receipt of the indication of the offer for the discount on the different item from the mobile device associated with the customer ~~sensor comprises a digital image analysis device operable to:~~
~~receive the images captured by the camera; and~~
~~analyze the received images to determine the state associated with the retail establishment.~~

61. (Currently amended) The system of claim 54, further comprising:
a central controller in communication with the vending machine, the central controller being operable to:

keep track of a number of times that offers associated with the retail establishment are output by the vending machine; and
determine, based at least in part on the number of times that offers associated with the retail establishment are output by the vending machine, an amount of payment owed by the retail establishment as compensation for the output offers ~~wherein the state associated with the retail establishment comprises a rate of transactions at the retail establishment.~~

62. (New) A method, comprising:
receiving, from a customer, a request to dispense an item at a vending machine;
determining, by the vending machine, that the item will not be dispensed by the vending machine;
determining, by the vending machine, whether a current time satisfies a predetermined criteria based on hours of operation of the retail establishment; and
outputting to the customer, in the case that the current time satisfies the predetermined criteria based on hours of operation of the retail establishment, a coupon

for the item to be redeemed at the retail establishment, wherein the outputting is conducted based on the determination that the item will not be dispensed by the vending machine.

63. (New) The method of claim 62, wherein the determining that the item will not be dispensed by the vending machine comprises:

determining that the item cannot be dispensed by the vending machine due to the item being out of stock at the vending machine.

64. (New) The method of claim 62, wherein the determining that the item will not be dispensed by the vending machine comprises:

determining that an amount of inventory of the item at the vending machine is below a predefined inventory threshold.

65. (New) The method of claim 62, wherein the coupon is for a discount on the item if redeemed by the customer at the retail establishment.

66. (New) A method, comprising:

receiving, by a central controller, reporting data from a plurality of vending machines;

determining, by the central controller, a retailer identifier;

determining, by the central controller, an offer identifier associated with the retailer identifier;

determining, by the central controller, a vending machine identifier associated with the retailer identifier and the offer identifier;

identifying, by the central controller, a subset of the reporting data that was received from a vending machine from the plurality of vending machines, wherein the vending machine is identified by the vending machine identifier;

determining, by the central controller and based on the subset of the reporting data received from the vending machine, a number of times that an offer identified by the offer identifier has been output by the vending machine during a specific time period;

calculating, by the central controller and based at least in part on the number of times that the offer has been output by the vending machine during the specific time period, an amount owed by a retailer identified by the retailer identifier;

determining, by the central controller, contact information associated with the retailer; and

transmitting, by the central controller and based on the contact information, a bill for the amount owed to the retailer.

67. (New) The method of claim 66, further comprising:

determining, by the vending machine, that the subset of reporting data is required to be transmitted to the central controller;

determining, by the vending machine, the subset of reporting data summarizing metrics regarding offers output by the vending machine during the specific time period; and

transmitting, by the vending machine, the subset of reporting data to the central controller.